

The five history books that have most influenced me...

Les cinq livres d'histoire qui m'ont le plus influencé...

As part of our contribution to millennial madness, the *Bulletin* editors invited individual historians (some senior, some junior, some retired, some still in graduate school) to complete in 250 words the following statement: "The five history books published in the 20th century that have most influenced me as a historian are..." Below you will find their responses. This survey is totally unrepresentative, absolutely unscientific, but fun nonetheless!

Dans le cadre de notre contribution à la folie du millénaire, les rédacteurs du Bulletin ont convié des historiens (chevronnés ou débutants, retraités ou candidats au baccalauréat) de compléter en 250 mots la phrase suivante : « Les cinq livres d'histoire qui m'ont le plus influencé en tant qu'historien sont... » Vous trouverez leurs réponses ci-dessous. Ce sondage parfaitement dépourvu de tout fondement scientifique n'est absolument pas représentatif, ce qui ne l'empêche pas d'être extrêmement amusant.

- Le livre qui m'a le plus influencé, celui auquel je pense le plus souvent, a été écrit par François Furet et s'intitule *Le Passé d'une illusion*. Dans ce gros ouvrage, Furet tente une explication de ce qui fut probablement la plus grande illusion du dernier siècle : le communisme. J'ai aimé ce livre parce qu'il étudie le parcours d'une idée, parce qu'il perçoit l'individu comme un être libre de ses choix, parce qu'il nous livre une synthèse qui donne un sens à notre époque. Deux autres livres occupent une place très importante dans mon cheminement. Les deux traitent d'historiographie canadienne. Auteur de *The Writing of Canadian History*, Carl Berger nous peint une fresque d'histoire intellectuelle saisissante. Faisant preuve d'érudition, de nuances et de beaucoup d'intelligence, Berger tente de comprendre les motivations personnelles de tous les grands historiens canadiens de ce siècle. Son livre a d'ailleurs servi d'inspiration à Ronald Rudin dans *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec*, un autre ouvrage qui m'a grandement influencé dans ma compréhension de l'histoire du Canada français. Rudin nous rend plus humble face à l'écriture de l'histoire. De toutes les époques, les historiens ont estimé être « objectifs » mais, sans parfois s'en rendre compte, ils furent hantés par les questions de leur époque. Une bonne leçon pour un jeune historien!

Éric Bédard, candidat au doctorat, Université McGill

- The five books written in the twentieth century that have influenced me most as a historian are Michael B. Katz, *The People of Hamilton*, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century City, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans: A People's Uprising at Romans, 1579-1580*, Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, David Sabeau, *Power in the Blood: Popular Culture and Village Discourse in Early Modern Germany* and John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death Among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France*. Katz' study of Hamilton introduced me to large-scale quantitative studies, and encouraged me in the belief that it is possible to recreate the life experiences of people who left few records. Although I do not pursue research using the same methodology, the desire to approach history in this manner remains. Le Roy Ladurie's recreation of mentalités and social conflict in sixteenth-century France suggests fascinating ways to read historical evidence. It also evokes the dynamic nature of early modern history, where "freedom" took different forms than in our lifetimes. Likewise, Sabeau's study of German village culture provides insights into the methods of interpreting local-level events. Spence's work on China reminds me that history is also about writing stories. Presentation, in addition to scholarship, is of vital importance. Finally, McManners' book of attitudes towards death and life provides an evocative lesson that history is about people who also struggled to make sense of their world, and that historians can deal with those struggles with both gentle humour and deep humanity.

Colin Coates, Director, Centre of Canadian Studies,
University of Edinburgh

- R.G. Collingwood was the first writer who forced me to reflect on the practice of history. In *The Idea of History* (1946) he made the startling statement that "all history is the history of thought". By this he did not mean that intellectual history is the only kind that matters. His point was that the historian seeks to discover the thoughts that made people act the way they did. Indispensable to the writing of history therefore is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind. Or, to put it another way, history is re- thinking the thoughts of the past. E.H. Carr's *What is History?* (1961) also interested me, not because of his crude dismissal of history's failures, but because of his intriguing discussion of the problem of causation, and how the historian actually works. John

Keegan's *The Face of Battle* (1976) is an example of the "new military history" that is not only magnificently written, but also illustrates Collingwood's dictum. Keegan brilliantly recreates the terror and the misery of the battlefield experience for the common soldier. He also explores combat motivation, and convincingly argues that hackneyed concepts such as courage, honour and leadership play a crucial role, since battle is essentially a moral conflict. William McNeill's *The Pursuit of Power* (1982) is in the same genre. An exploration of how warfare has been transformed over the past thousand years, it awards the laurels to Prince William of Nassau for discovering the importance of drill in advancing the efficiency and morale of an army. "When a group of men move their arm and leg muscles in unison for prolonged periods of time, a primitive and very powerful social bond wells up among them...Military drill...tapped this primitive reservoir of sociality directly". Finally, S.R. Gardiner's eighteen-volume *History of England, 1603-1656* (1883-1901) is still required reading for every serious student of the seventeenth century. By an exhaustive reading of manuscripts and printed sources in half a dozen languages Gardiner produced a masterly rethinking of the thoughts of the past.

Ian Gentles, Glendon College, York University

- Two of the five books I've selected reflect my enjoyment of broad, synthetic works. Eric Hobsbawm's *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991* (1994) and Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People Without History* (1982) both analyse a vast array of global developments in a comprehensible framework. Given my predilection to get caught up in the details of European politics, Wolf's book serves as a powerful corrective, describing how cultures evolve in relation to one another and how such interactions can be horribly destructive. I admire all of Hobsbawm's writings, but for someone who concentrates on the contemporary era *Age of Extremes* is a treasure, combining lucid treatments of socioeconomic trends with telling comments on, among other matters, the volution of Western popular culture after 1945. The collective work by Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth About History* (1994), informed me a great deal about the development of history as a discipline. The authors defend the historian's ability to achieve knowledge of the past while also providing a critique of established structures and patterns of thinking, a practice essential to sustaining a democratic society. One need not share all of their conclusions to admire the scope of this work, with its incisive converge of topics such as the impact of notions of scientific objectivity on historical writing. Finally, I cite two books in my own research area, twentieth-century France. The first, by my doctoral supervisor, William D. Irvine, *French*

Conservatism in Crisis (1979), studies a right-wing political party in the 1930s and strongly influenced the structure and approach of my dissertation. Finally, a work that I constantly turn to for its insight and clarity of expression is Robert Paxton's *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (1972), which literally redefined the historiography of its subject. To be sure, some of its conclusions have been qualified or elaborated upon by subsequent research; but for an introduction not only to Vichy but to many aspects of contemporary French politics and society it remains indispensable.

Sean Kennedy, University of New Brunswick

- My own idiosyncratic list begins with E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (Penguin, 1963). Despite the legitimacy of recent feminist critiques, Thompson's powerful and passionate history of the development of class consciousness among English workers remains a ground-breaking and enormously influential work. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Hutchinson, 1987) is among the first books to show in fine and complex detail how one could do gender history - not just studying men and women, but also looking at the shifting gendered meanings of their lives. Thompson and Davidoff and Hall's books were particularly important to my own scholarly development in that they both saw religion as integral to understanding their subjects, a recognition that remains elusive to most gender, social and labour historians. Not all of my "best books", however, touch on religion. In *Love and Toil: Motherhood in Outcast London, 1870- 1918* (Oxford Univ. Press 1993) Ellen Ross's skill, empathy and extensive research enables us both to viscerally feel the misery, anxiety and exhaustion of so many working- class mothers and to understand the complex ways in which the meanings and expectations they had of motherhood differed significantly from our own. Ross also presents an unromanticized exploration of the complexities and ambiguous legacies of the active, but limited agency of the oppressed. George Chauncey's *Gay New York* (Basic Books, 1994) amazed me at first reading, and continues to impress. Chauncey did what only the very best history does, which is to fundamentally reshape understandings of the past, in this case demonstrating that previous historians' unquestioned use of current homosexual/heterosexual binaries had no meaning to early twentieth century New York men, who constructed their own very different and far more complex worlds of sexual meanings. In *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes* (Yale Univ. Press, 1996) Robert Orsi explores women's faith and subjectivity, creativity, agency and oppression, in a theoretically informed, subtle,

complex and empathetic approach which points to new and exciting possibilities for incorporating religion into cutting edge work in social, gender and cultural history.

Lynne Marks, *Dept. of History, University of Victoria*

- When I was still an undergraduate student, Griselda Pollock's *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (Routledge, 1988) showed me, not only that Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt had painted the "spaces of femininity" during the late nineteenth century, but that it was possible for feminist art historians to create their own spaces within the modern university. Like Pollock, Mieke Bal, especially in her *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge, 1991), revealed that art historians could do far more than simply muse, along with Kenneth Clark, about whether or not Renoir's nudes were like peaches ripe for the plucking. Bal instead challenged me to appreciate both literary theory and the smell of paint. Perhaps that is why I went on to spend the better part of my first year in graduate school reading the works of Sigmund Freud, an activity that no doubt affected me in profound and disturbing ways I am not yet able to articulate fully. Although Freud's influence may be most evident in my desire to see beyond the "manifest content", he also helped me to understand the sheer efficacy of repression and denial. I will therefore invoke these strategies in order to move on to my third selection, *L'amour de l'art : Les Musées européens et leur public* (Minuit, 1969). Using the data collected in the first extensive visitor surveys of European museums, the French sociologists Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel concluded that, while apparently open to a diverse public, museums in fact both produced and reinforced class distinctions. In an even more extensive critique of the foundations of the Western aesthetic tradition, Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting*, (University of Chicago Press, 1987) unraveled Kant's search for the proper object of the pure judgment of taste. More recently, however, the combination of careful archival research with a thorough understanding of contemporary visual and postcolonial theory in Ruth B. Phillip's *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (University of Washington Press and McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998) reassured me that it is still possible to be an art historian, or I should say a historian of visual culture, even as we enter this "new" millennium.

Lianne McTavish, *Department of History, UNB*

- Genevieve Foster's American history books for children awakened my love of history, but the most influential early book was the abridged version of Toynbee's *A Study of History*, from which I learned that history could transcend the preoccupations of fur traders and politicians to encompass the movement of ideas and the rise and fall of religions. I spent my nineteenth year in Europe, intrigued by a medieval manual on Albigensian heretics, learned tomes on Joan of Arc, and histories of revolutionary France, all demonstrating that historians' politics affected their writing. Back in North America, I read Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* and became convinced that the ideal Canadian historian read both French and English. Perhaps it was introducing Pepys to high school students in the 1960s that taught me the importance of social history, but the most influential book of this period was Bernard Bailyn's *Education in the Forming of American Society*, discovered when I embarked on my doctorate. Bailyn confirmed a growing belief that exploring educational history was vital to understanding the modern world. Finally, Sylvia Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties* took me back to the fur traders, but with a difference. First nations women as well as mixed blood and white women moved to centre stage and confirmed another developing conviction: that understanding women's history is crucial to understanding all history. For that reason, I cannot end my account without recommending at least one contemporary book: Bonnie Smith's *The Gender of History*. Read it and be both amazed and refreshed.

Alison Prentice, *University of Victoria; OISE*

- La profession d'historien ne m'attirait guère quand j'étais étudiant à l'Université de Leningrad. Rien ne m'avait rendu cette profession plus répugnante que le cours obligatoire d'histoire du Parti Communiste, dont le manuel canonique changeait de contenu chaque fois qu'un nouveau leader prenait le pouvoir en URSS. Voici, donc, un livre qui m'a immunisé pour toujours contre les récits d'histoire théologiques. Deux livres m'ont sensibilisé à l'histoire, les deux écrits par des Anglais formés en physique : C.P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*, et Derek De Solla Price, *Little Science, Big Science*. Le premier m'a montré l'abîme culturel qui sépare le monde des sciences et le monde littéraire. Je suis hereux que mes cours attirent autant d'étudiants en science qu'en histoire. Le second m'a présenté la science en tant qu'objet d'étude ordinaire, démystifié, que l'on peut observer et mesurer. Un autre livre m'a montré qu'en choisissant la science en tant qu'objet d'étude, l'on peut déjouer la censure. Vasilii Nalimov, l'auteur de *Naukometria*, statisticien de renom et ex-prisonnier du Goulag, livrait une critique mordante du

régime totalitaire tout en prétendant qu'il ne parlait que de la science. Ces trois livres m'ont encouragé à poursuivre mes études doctorales en histoire des sciences plutôt qu'en chimie organique où j'avais déjà été accepté. Je me rejouis toujours de cette décision. Enfin, le livre *Out of the Ghetto* par Jacob Katz a stimulé ma réflexion sur la culture juive contemporaine et ses rapports aux cultures scientifiques, une réflexion qui est autant savante que personnelle.

Yakov M. Rabkin, département d'histoire, Université de Montréal

- Chronologically, the first historical work to expand my perspective on the past was E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, which showed me that we can learn a great deal about people neglected in conventional histories through analyses of popular songs, rituals, and sociability. The next book to broaden my conception of history was Fernand Braudel's *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800*, which introduced me to the importance of demography, geography, material history, and consumption patterns. Thirdly, Natalie Zemon Davis's collection of essays, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, drew my attention to women's participation in popular uprisings and religious change and to the utility of deep analysis and other techniques of symbolic anthropology in historical interpretation. Joan Wallach Scott's two collections of essays, *Gender and the Politics of History* and *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, would be my fourth and fifth choices. The first book persuaded me that gender is a category of historical analysis with implications far beyond women's history and that there is a place in historical research for conscious deconstruction of the language deployed and assumptions embedded in archival and other sources. The latter alerted me to the need to acknowledge, and not to try to reconcile, the paradoxes in women's history and in history generally. It is perhaps redundant to conclude by saying that French anthropologists like Pierre Bourdieu and French feminist literary critics have also profoundly influenced my historical research and writing.

Mary Lynn Stewart, Simon Fraser University

- During the over forty years I have studied, researched, and written about history (principally that of modern Europe and Germany), a number of books have made an indelible impression on my thought and life - many more than the handful I can mention here. The first "real" historical tomes I owned while still a schoolboy were Winston Churchill's

memoir of *The Second World War* (Boston, 1948-1953), all six volumes of which I read including their lengthy documentary appendices to the permanent benefit of my own admiration for literary style. As an undergraduate my personal religious complacency was shaken by two related studies on *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars* (New York, 1962) and *In Solitary Witness: The Life and Death of Franz Jägerstätter* (New York, 1965) whose author, the American sociologist Gordon Zahn, had himself been a conscientious objector imprisoned for his beliefs after 1941. The book I most vividly recall reading as part of my doctoral field requirements was a classic by Geroid T. Robinson, *Rural Russia Under the Old Regime* (London, 1932), supplemented by a pair of novels (Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* and *Dead Souls* by Gogol); together they taught me the value of great works of fiction in achieving a better understanding of developments in history, in this case the institution of Russian serfdom. Finally, in my courses on contemporary Germany I regularly assigned students to read Alan Bullock's biography *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (New York, 1962, rev. ed.) As well as the pioneering publication on a locality by William S. Allen, *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town 1922-1945* (New York, 1984, rev. ed.). From the former I had learned that it was possible to write a scholarly account of even the most horrendous personalities and events in history; whereas the latter encouraged me to devote almost three decades of my career to reconstructing the interwar course followed by another Kleinstadt. Indeed, Eutin in Holstein continues to preoccupy me in retirement.

Lawrence D. Stokes, Dalhousie University, Adjunct Professor; retired

- S'interroger sur les livres qui nous ont le plus influencés dans notre pratique de l'histoire, c'est aussi essayer de comprendre ce qui nous a donné notre vision du monde. Il y en a souvent deux ou trois qui se démarquent ou qui nous viennent rapidement à l'esprit. En premier arrive *L'Occident devant la révolution soviétique* de Marc Ferro. Cet ouvrage doit se voir non pas comme un livre sur un événement, mais plutôt comme une étude sur la perception que l'extérieur a d'un phénomène bouleversant l'ordre établi. Derrière le phénomène figé reste alors notre vision qui elle, tout en évoluant, façonne notre manière d'interpréter le présent. Un deuxième ouvrage majeur dans ma compréhension de l'histoire est *Les Chinois à Montréal : 1877 à 1951* de Denise Helly. Écrit par une anthropologue, ce livre montre une vision sociale d'un phénomène aussi important que la transplantation d'une culture dans un lieu. Il démontre ainsi l'importance des études multidisciplinaires des groupes

minoritaires. Comprendre l'autre dans son développement est, pour commencer, se regarder soi, mais aussi regarder son voisin, principalement lorsqu'il est le principal canal de la transformation culturelle. Dans l'enseignement de l'histoire au collégial, comprendre l'évolution de notre voisin du sud est primordial même si on n'enseigne pas l'histoire des États-Unis. C'est ce que permet le livre *La civilisation américaine*. Mais n'en nommer que trois, c'est malgré tout en mettre d'autres de côté. Comment passer sous silence des livres comme *Les trois ordres* ou *L'imaginaire du féodalisme* de Georges Duby, ou simplement un simple livre sur l'histoire du Québec comme *Histoire du Québec contemporain*?

J.-Louis Vallée, professeur d'histoire, Centre d'études collégiales de Montmagny

- The five history books published this century that have most influenced me as a historian are: C.P. Stacey, *A Very Double Life, The Private World of Mackenzie King* (1976); Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox, an Essay on Tolstoy's View of History* (1953); D.G. Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Young Politician* (1952) and *The Old Chieftain* (1955); Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow, a History, a Story and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier* (1955); and a children's book, A. Philippa Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958). Stacey's book has an instructive though dangerous undercurrent: he did not really like King, and occasionally his account is overtaken by surrenders to *Schadenfreude*. In Stacey's case it should be remembered that the whole corpus of his work is important, whereas with D.G. Creighton his fame can rest especially on his *Macdonald*, though he might not have relished one saying so. Unlike Stacey, Creighton admired his subject, so much so that one can say that Macdonald's enemies became Creighton's. But for a brilliant amalgam of research and writing, Creighton's *Macdonald* has few superiors. Isaiah Berlin can stand on his own as intellectual history. Stegner's book is a marvelous transmutation of the history of southern Saskatchewan into literature. Philippa Pearce's is for children, and other people like me, who love the mysterious magic that grows from an unobtrusive context; here a young boy's adventures in a garden flash him back to a world two generations earlier. All this suggests that history is about peoples' lives, from which we make analysis and abstractions at our peril.

P.B. Waite, Professor Emeritus, Dalhousie University

- I have named these my five best history books of the past

century because they were important in shaping my curiosity about history and memory in the context of empire and racism. If my choices are incomplete and idiosyncratic, the books are still worth reading. Edward Said's *Orientalism* has been much criticized in recent decades, but still provides the basic reference point for rethinking the foundations of European claims to knowledge about their colonized others. Although Philip Curtin's *The Image of Africa* is squarely a history of British rather than African ideas, it prefigures much currently fashionable writing about the intricacies of cultural invention in the power plays of imperialism. Samuel Johnson's *A History of the Yorubas* is a magisterial study by a Nigerian missionary. It is an exemplar of many African's attempts to render their past in a new form, but also far more. Careful reflection on it reveals how little we still understand the complex currents of colonial intellectual life. By connecting the deep and diverse roots of Pan-Africanism into one framework, Imanuel Geiss (in *The Pan-African Movement*), simultaneously opened the stage of Black Atlantic history and set a challenging research agenda for later scholars. Finally, Anthony Appiah's incisive reflections on what the idea of Africa has meant and should mean to African intellectuals, in his *In My Father's House*, charts territory which promises to lead Africa's intellectual history beyond the powerful legacies of European empire and racism.

Philip S. Zachernuk, Department of History, Dalhousie University

